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ABSTRACT

The College Board's recent report on academic preparation for college calls for foreign language proficiencies to be developed in secondary education. The needed proficiencies are outlined more specifically in a special booklet that also offers teachers practical suggestions for achieving them. The process of integrating language proficiency goals into the curriculum will require that teachers re-examine the issues of functions, tasks, content, and accuracy to ensure their appropriateness. Teachers will have to provide students with the tools, such as grammar and vocabulary, to deal with authentic language, and will have to expand students' linguistic environments through instructional materials and technology, some of which has already been available for a long time and some of which is new. The College Board is attempting to draw in teachers, administrators, and others to focus on the need for foreign language proficiency and the means of developing it in the classroom. (MSE)

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Toward Further Discussion:

EQuality in the High School Foreign Language Classroom

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by

Thomas R. Beyer, Jr.

As many of you know the College Board recently completed a long term "Educational EQuality Project," whose results are summarized in **Academic Preparation for College**--often referred to as the "Green Book." The project and the booklet stressed two elements: excellence and equality for all potential college students, i.e. for a broad audience of high school students. Briefly stated the book defines "What students need to know and be able to do?"

That premise, though simple sounding, is actually a revolutionary step in the way in which we approached education and, in particular, ~~for~~ foreign language education. The "Green Book" calls for <u>proficiency</u> in foreign language skills, described as follows:

> **The ability to ask** and answer questions and maintain a **simple conversation** in areas of immediate need and on **very familiar** topics.
>
> **The ability to pronounce** the language well enough to be intelligible to native speakers.
>
> **The ability to understand**, with some repetition, simple questions and statements.
>
> **The ability to read and understand** the information presented in a simple paragraph.

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The ability to write a short paragraph on a familiar topic.

The ability to deal with some everyday situations in the culture such as greetings, leave-takings, buying food, and asking directions.

I sense here that I am speaking to the faithful, or the believers, and not those in need of hearing of the message. The skills which we are seeking to develope sound very familiar to those acquainted with the old Foreign Service Institute and more recent Interagency Language Roundtable guidelines. Others will probably recognize the echo of the A.C.T.F.L.'s own Proficiency Guidelines.

The wide dissemination of the College Board's **Academic Preparation for College** has raised questions and calls for assistance and direction in achieving the outcomes. The College Board has responded with a project of new booklets to support primarily teachers (and interested administrators and school principals), by offering more specific suggestions on curriculum and instruction.

The Foreign Language Advisory Committee of the College Board has worked toward a document which would provide teachers with a useful, common sense document. It will, we hope, embody a vision of language and culture. It will stress proficiency and define that term more precisely for those unfamiliar with it. The booklet will also focus on and elaborate on the skills in the "Green Book" and offer practical suggestions as to how to achieve those proficiencies. I should, once again, emphasize the fact,

that our goal is to reach a wide audience, especially those individuals and institutions where Foreign Language education is not fully developed or not readily available.

All of us are convinced that this is an exciting and challenging time for Foreign Language education. Increasingly we are evolving into a society surrounded by multi-lingual opportunities; to deal with them we will need a multi-skills and multi-lingual proficiency. I would like to point to just two areas. The first is geographic. In my own foreign language, Russian, (not one of the more commonly taught languages), in New York, Chicago and Boston there are now large new Russian speaking communities with their own newspapers, journals, publishing houses, restaurants, cabarets, theaters, and even a growing film industry. Imagine then the wealth of opportunities in Spanish. Second, and even more important, recent breakthroughs in cable television, video recorders and satellite reception, are making it possible for us to watch TV in any number of languages. For the "Sesame Street" generation, this may be the most profound development of the 1980's, equal or greater than the influence of computers on our lives and classrooms.

Given that the goal is proficiency, how do we achieve it? The Foreign Language teaching profession is blessed with some agreement on proficiency standards. Perhaps as significant is our ability to measure proficiency, to test for it.

If we have answered to a degree the questions "why" and

"what," why do we desire and need proficiency, and what constitutes proficiency, then the purpose of the forthcoming booklet is to concentrate on the question of "how." How do we effectively integrate proficiency into our curriculum and classrooms?

One major issue is the matter of curriculum planning. Previously our texts and often our teaching were dominated by a grammatical syllabus; now we have to re-examine some of our former premises and re-organize our efforts on the basis of the desired skills. This means looking at functions and tasks, content and accuracy to insure that all are appropriately presented.

On the day to day practical level we began by acknowledging that the the teacher is still the key to success in any Foreign Language program. We also decided to support an eclectic approach, and the very positive aspects in such an approach, since we were well aware that you can't please all of the people all of the time with only one way of doing things. Our original intention was to expand the vision of teachers, concerning both materials and methods.

Teachers in turn will have to expand the visions of their own students, by providing them in the classroom with the tools to deal with authentic language. Vocabulary, for example, will have to become personalized at the early levels, and thus will go beyond the limits of any textbook. Similarly, grammar will have

to be modified to permit the accomplishment of certain tasks which our students might be expected to encounter.

Because the authenticity of language is central to the concept of proficiency, we should begin to focus on our expanded linguistic environment. I have mentioned our already multi-lingual society and the onset of video technology. The major thrust over the next few years ought to be the identification of resources and raw materials. Let's re-examine what we already have! Newspapers, printed both abroad and here in the United States, journals, books, radio broadcasts, old tapes. Lots of us have boxes and boxes of these things, but much of it has been regularly discarded as old junk. I remember how excited I was at thirteen when I saw my first copy of the Russian newspaper, Pravda. Capture that spirit with your students by sharing with them your old materials.

Turning for a moment to technological advances and their implications for the immediate future, I see several promising developments. Computers and the area of Computer Assisted Instruction have experienced a rebirth of interest with the explosion of micro computers. "Walkman" has become a generic term, and students freed from the confines of the language lab can still maximalize exposure time to real language. Video cassettes are already making availabe at reasonable prices materials once found only in expensive films. Other exciting developments are just around the corner. Soon cable TV will be

providing an unheard of selection of programs--20--40--60! This capability will probably become as standard as radio. Video cassettes and disks are already being interfaced with personal computers. Interception of satellite programs while still expensive and in its infancy for private users offers the entire world for our classrooms.

What I am trying to suggest is that all of us must be sensitive and responsive to changing times. We must also, to be perfectly honest, become the cheerleaders for our own programs and for promoting and generating enthusiasm for the study of foreign languages.

The College Board sees its effort as one more step in inaugurating a widespread national discussion on how to carry proficiciency into the classroom. Its booklet is intended to draw in principals, teachers and, most of all, those still unaffected by the development of "proficiency awareness." By so doing we hope to support the work and efforts of other professional organizations, drawing on the momentum that exists already in many places , and getting the ball rolling in those places where it isn't.

I recall a visiting Soviet linguist replying to a student's question: "Why is Russian so hard to learn?" His answer was that Russian, and indeed every language, is a reflection of the greatest complexity known to us--the human mind, the human spirit, human aspiration. As such, any and every language must

necessarily be complex. Our own task is to share that complexity with our students--and while it is difficult, I know of nothing in the world quite so rewarding as the work we do in the Foreign Language classroom.